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# THE FAMILY ESTATE IN AFRICA

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*Studies in the Role of Property in Family Structure and Lineage Continuity*

*Edited by*

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[Title Page]

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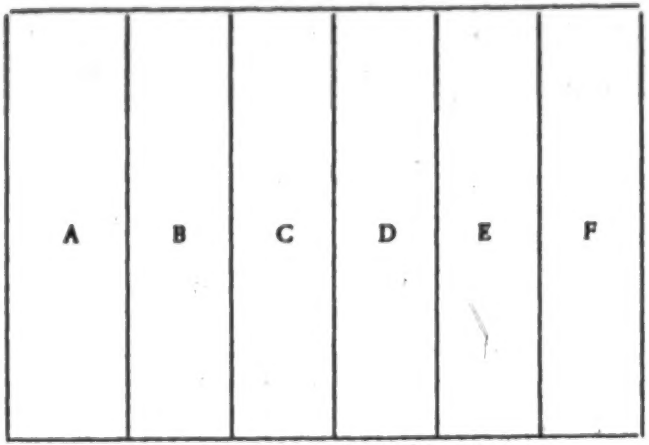


Chart of Positions of Kinship Diagram.
[This chart refers to the contents of Appendix I of the text, found on pp. 193-195. See category 116.--Analyst]
[Facing kinship diagram.]

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# PROPERTY, CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE, AND THE FAMILY CYCLE AMONG THE LOBEDU[1]

Eileen Jensen Krige

THE Lobedu are a South Bantu people characterized by the institution of 'divine kingship'. They live in a mountainous area of the North-eastern Transvaal lowveld. Originally from *Bokhalaga* (S. Rhodesia), they migrated south when the empire of Monomotapa broke up and established themselves as rulers over the sparse Sotho population they found in occupation. The rain-making powers of their queen, enhanced by the mystery and secrecy of her ritual seclusion, attracted many accretions from diverse tribal groups from surrounding areas who sought security and peace particularly during the period of unrest following the wars of Shaka, the Zulu, and the raids of Matabele and Swazi. For enemies feared to attack the Lobedu queen lest they be visited by drought and locusts. The descendants of the Lobedu proper therefore form only a small portion of the total population which, however, except for relatively recent Tsonga immigrants from Portuguese East Africa, is remarkably homogeneous in culture. The Lobedu had no military traditions and built up their kingdom by peaceful means.

The form of government is that of a central authority with the queen as the head of state and spatially defined political

[1]The field-work on which this essay is based was carried out jointly with my husband, the late J. D. Krige, under the auspices of the International African Institute in 1936–8, and was supplemented and brought up to date by short field trips in 1961 and 1962.

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642 631 units which, each under a headman, enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy.[1] A large proportion of these districts into 634 644 which the country is divided are ruled by the descendants of original sections of the nuclear group; a few have been allocated 562 643 to alien groups under their own headmen while some are held by royal women, *batanoni* or 'wives' of the queen. Many 557 588 districts now held by commoners originated from *batanoni* but since women do not succeed one another as heads of districts these have been inherited by their sons of husbands given to them by the queen. Royal wives (*batanoni*) are of various kinds. Some are of royal blood, daughters of close relatives of the queen to whom they have been given as a token of homage (*ho loba*). Only these are set up by the queen as rulers over districts. (Women may also rule areas in their own right where there is no male heir, as we shall see). Other royal wives are 644 643 the daughters of district heads, while a number are daughters 557 538 of foreign chiefs who come, sometimes with cattle, sometimes with money or a daughter to *loba* the queen for rain. Once a [682] woman from within the tribe has been accepted by the queen as a royal wife, the tie is renewed from generation to generation [634] on the pattern of cross-cousin marriage. Men may offer a daughter to the queen also in return for, or in the expectation of, economic help or political favour (though these are not always accepted) and there is a tendency today for districts to be subdivided into smaller and smaller units to satisfy the political aspirations of ambitious subjects. Royal wives bind to the queen not only her closest relatives but most of the important people in the tribe. Some wives are given away in marriage to her councillors, relatives and district headmen. [836] Some remain with her and have allocated lovers. Children of [602] these latter call the queen 'father' and she is responsible for helping them to marry.

563 613 The Lobedu proper appear originally to have regarded themselves as an aristocracy but today it is only the royal lineage (*ba Mohale*) and a number of important Lobedu district heads that are looked up to. Many non-Lobedu lineages have, by virtue of marriage links through royal wives, a higher status and are more closely related to the queen than sections of Lobedu themselves.

[1] For a general account of the Lobedu, see Krige, E. J. 1941, Krige, E. J. and J. D., 1945 and 1950, and Krige, J. D., 1939.

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Lobedu themselves. The society is remarkably egalitarian and there is no concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling group. Nor would this be easy in a tribe in which the limited resources in property (in cattle) are used primarily for, and are constantly being converted into, marriage alliances.

Other distinctive features of the Lobedu are their marked agricultural bias; a fertility cult with sacred drums; masked dancing; ritual arrangements in ancestor worship (in the form of impersonation of the spirits, the predominance of beer offerings and the *phasa* rite of spurting water out of the mouth as an accompaniment to prayer) which link them more closely to the tribes to the north than to their southern Nguni and Sotho neighbours where the blood sacrifice and cattle cult are more clearly marked.

*Agnatic Groupings*

Despite the fact that they are ruled by a queen and that women can and do hold important political and religious positions the Lobedu are a patrilineal people in the sense that a man belongs to his father's lineage, property is inherited in the male line and marriage is patrilocal. The tribe is made up of a large number of different totemic groups, Lion, Elephant, Crocodile, Wild Pig, none of which, not even the royal Lobedu totem, is confined to the Lobedu tribe. All these totems are found in neighbouring tribes and many also in other parts of the Transvaal and elsewhere. A few groups have no totem (*motupo*) but designate themselves by their place of origin, e.g., *Mokhalaga*. Groups which have the same totem do not consider themselves related if they come from different places of origin. Elephant of Khalaga are thus unrelated to Elephant of Tsubye or Elephant of Thobolo. People sometimes swear by (*ana*) their totem and are supposed to but do not always abstain from eating it. The totemic name is useful only as a distinguishing mark; e.g., in divination the bones may indicate a person of the Elephant or Lion totem as responsible for illness or theft. Beyond this the *motupo* has little meaning and today many of the young people do not even use the term. The totemic group is not exogamous.

The lineage has no distinguishing name, the term *moloko* or

The lineage has no distinguishing name, the term mokoko or
613 *leloko* which is in common use referring to the group of agnates
[602] as well as to the relatives on the mother's side of the family.
The lineage segment of four to five generations tracing its
[787] descent from a common male ancestor (grandfather of the adult males) shares a common major shrine and occasionally meets at the harvest thanksgiving or when a *mokhobo* (a gathering of the descendants of a particular common ancestor) is indicated by the diviner as the wish of a troublesome spirit.
[592] Such a group of agnates of four to five generations in depth tends to be concentrated in the same locality and in many cases may be found in the same homestead (*motse*). As neighbours
[476] and relatives they share in many common activities such as helping in each other's work-parties, taking part in girls' puberty ceremonies, consulting each other in the marriage of their sons and daughters. Only in the minimal lineage of father and sons are there jural ties. The lineage is not a land-owning unit, has no political functions, is not exogamous, marriage within the lineage being common especially in the Lobedu royal group.

[562] An interesting feature of the Lobedu lineage is the important part played by its women who continue even after marriage to be active in lineage affairs as leaders in religious ritual and as
[582] guardians over their brothers' households. The merging of the
[769] ancestors on the father's and mother's side of the family which results from preferential marriage with the mother's uterine brother's daughter and the inclusion in ancestor worship of relatives on both sides, which will be described later, also affect
613 the character of the lineage. A religious gathering (*mokhobo*) of
769 the descendants of Sekhobo which I attended showed the lineage segment of five generations in operation and illustrated
[602] some of these points. Descendants through both sons and daughters in the line of Sekhobo's chief wife took part in the ceremony and, in addition to calling upon the deceased father and other male ascendants of the head of the lineage, the officiator mentioned by name also the deceased father's uterine sisters and the father's mother. The inclusion of the father's mother was all the more remarkable because this was a gathering of the descendants of Sekhobo and it had been the specific complaint of the troubling ancestor that every year harvest beer was being offered to the spirits on the father's mother's

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side, not to the Sekhobo side. The lineage head's father's mother had been a 'wife' and close relative of the queen, a connection which the Sekhobo family tended to stress socially and which was reflected also in their religion (they had a cow dedicated to and representing her).

The Lobedu lineage, in fact, does not operate as a group to the exclusion of other kin except in informal consultations on matters of marriage or litigation; and the lineage does not emerge in everyday activities as a clearly marked unit. A *mokhobo* such as the above is one of two or three rare occasions when the lineage comes together and in every one of these cases both sons and daughters and their children are invited to be present.

Lobedu homesteads vary in size and composition from a typical minimum of a married man with his mother, wife and children to a group of half-brothers, their mothers, wives, children and grandchildren, still living together after the death of the father. Very often other relatives, such as a widowed sister and her children, a maternal relative or an affine of the head are to be found living in the homestead. But these are the least stable elements and tend to move away in a short time. Though small units continuously hive off, and there is a good deal of change in the small homesteads of more recent immigrants or where a migrant labourer husband has never returned, the Lobedu homestead is on the whole, especially in the case of the chief son and his descendants, a remarkably stable unit. Over a period of thirty years most of the larger homesteads known to me have remained in the same place or been rebuilt a few hundred yards from the old site after the death of their head.

### *Economy of the Lobedu and their attitude to property*

The economy of the Lobedu is a subsistence one based mainly on agriculture and stock-raising supplemented by migrant labour in European areas. Land for cultivation is allotted to individuals by the district head. Once allocated, fields are inherited in the male line and cannot be taken away so long as they are in effective use. Only if a man moves away from the district or is chased out as a witch can he and his family lose

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their right to their lands. It is usual for people to 'beg' fields also in areas other than that in which they are living, partly to take advantage of diverse climatic conditions, partly because of land shortage; but their right to these is not as strong as to fields in their home district. Land shortage has not yet reached serious proportions owing to the fact that since the 1920's the tribe has been buying up sparsely populated Crown lands to the north. Grazing and the right to collect wood, thatching grass, wild fruits and plants for economic use are free to all, though herd-boys jealously guard good pastures in their own areas to which they feel they have first right.

Livestock takes the form chiefly of cattle and goats; fowls, still forbidden at the Capital, were introduced by the Tsonga; donkeys and pigs are a European innovation, the former being popular among Christians for use in ploughing and transport, the latter being kept largely by women for exchange purposes. Though of considerable economic importance cattle play little part in the diet of the people, being used mainly for ritual purposes and as bride-price. They move in a chain of marriage exchanges from one family to another, creating and maintaining social links and knitting together in preferred marriage the descendants of brothers and sisters. It was calculated in 1939 that bride-price accounted for 95 per cent of all transfers of cattle in the Lobedu tribe.[1] Cattle coming in as bride-price are not supposed to be used for any other purpose than marriage for, unlike the Zulu who kept large herds, constantly replenished in the old days by raids against neighbours, most Lobedu families do not possess cattle except for short periods of time.

Lobedu ideas of property and their attitude to its possession and accumulation are rather different from ours. The correct use of cattle in Lobedu eyes lies not in accumulation but in their investment in 'building a house', i.e., setting up a new social and economic unit of a wife and children. Surplus crops, similarly, are not accumulated but are generally consumed in a succession of after-harvest beer parties in honour of kin and affines which adds considerably to one's prestige. This, so often cited as evidence of wastefulness and lack of foresight is, in the absence of any really reliable termite- or pest-proof form of storage (which makes accumulation risky), a means of insur-

[1] Krige, J. D., 1939, p. 396.

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ance against future want by building up relations of friendship and goodwill with kin and neighbours whom you can call upon for assistance in time of need. Nor does property, as in Western society, command the services of others to any appreciable extent. The core of helpers in a work-party are there primarily because of ties of kinship and neighbourhood; the beer that is served may be enjoyed by any passer-by who wishes to join in. Traditionally, then, property is of value to the Lobedu only in so far as it can be consumed or meets an immediate need on the one hand or, on the other, is used for creating and maintaining social relationships. This is changing now under conditions of culture contact but the change is still largely confined to Christians.

There is not a great deal of exchange and what there is takes the form most frequently of gift exchange[1]. Property in the form of a gift is a tangible sign of a social relationship. A new bride speaks to no one in her new homestead until given a small gift in token of her new social relationship to the giver and the same holds for a newly-initiated boy or girl. Ties with one's maternal kin and with affines are also kept alive by gifts and gift-exchange. It is significant that agnatic ties are the only ones that do not require continuous gift-exchange. Yet even here a service rendered seldom goes unrewarded. Property and human relationships are, then, closely interlinked. That it is not possible always to separate economic and social relationship among the Lobedu is shown by the following examples. Just after the 1895 rinderpest Khidima, a royal relative, went to the queen, who is traditionally responsible for giving succour to orphans and the needy, to ask for money to buy mealies. She gave him some. A few years later he sent a messenger to her to say he 'had a baby daughter'. The queen accepted the gift and when the girl reached puberty presented her with a *thari* goat according to custom. Cattle followed and the girl, Myakwane, was duly 'married' by the queen. This was the beginning of a permanent bride-giving-bride-receiving relationship, for in 1950 the queen sent a messenger to the widow of Myakwane's brother who had used his sister's cattle, to ask for her daughter in marriage. *'Ge loda dikhomo tja ka. Ge nyaga mosadi a de a nthsidela*—I am following the tracks of my cattle.

[1] Krige, E. J., 1941.

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I want a wife to come and stamp for me', said the queen. The girl was married by the queen and shortly after was given to the son of another 'wife' (*motanoni*) of the queen with whom she is now living at the Capital.

Sometimes the transaction takes on more of an economic character, a man pledging his daughter in order to receive economic help. Thus Jim's father in a period of starvation took his ten-year-old daughter to a man at Malemacha and said, 'I am starving and poor. Give me money. I have a girl, a *ledolo*'. Money was given to him and later when the girl was sent in marriage, cattle were handed over in the usual way. More commonly this technique was used when a man had no sister whose cattle he might use to marry with. He then went to a maternal or affinal relative or to a friend or even a stranger who had cattle, saying: '*Ge no khuru*—I have a knee', in reference to his procreative powers, thus pledging himself to send an as yet unborn daughter in marriage. Today such transactions have become infrequent since money can so easily be obtained by migrant labour or a loan can be repaid in money without having to pledge a daughter.

The cattle or other property (marriage hoes were used in the old days)[1] establish tangible obligations between the two families which can be upheld at law even though the contract is fulfilled only in the next generation or later. Moreover the bond is permanent: other marriages will follow the first from generation to generation in a manner that will be described below. The use of women in property transactions of this kind which is not considered to be derogatory by the Lobedu is all the more remarkable in the light of the very high position of, and the power wielded by, women in Lobedu social life.

### *Some Aspects of Marriage*

It will be necessary before discussing the domestic cycle to examine briefly the nature of Lobedu marriage; for not only does marriage establish strong economic and social relation-

[1] These hoes were too large and heavy for tilling the soil and were merely kept in a hut. The chief councillor of the queen, a man of about eighty years old, still remembers the use of marriage hoes in a few cases in his boyhood. Six hoes or eight head of cattle passed in marriage at that time.

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ships between the families involved but upon it rests the whole character of the domestic group. Payment of bride-price transfers the reproductive powers of the woman to the husband's agnatic group. The husband has genetricial as well as uxorial rights. Genetricial rights apply not only to any children born after the marriage whoever their biological father might be, but also in retrospect, so that any child born before marriage automatically becomes the child of whoever pays the bride-price, with full rights of succession and inheritance from its sociological father. There is thus, in contrast to other tribes such as the Zulu, no way in which a Lobedu man can obtain the right to his biological child other than by marrying its mother. Emphasis on sociological as opposed to biological fatherhood among the Lobedu is very strong and this is an important factor in Lobedu social structure. The rights of a father to a child involve control over it; the right to the bride-price of a daughter (subject to the right of her brother to marry with his sister's cattle and of her mother to the services of the woman married with her daughter's bride-price); and corresponding to his right to his daughter's bride-price the duty to help his son to marry. A father may and often does marry an additional wife with his daughter's bride-price. A father also has the right to be cared for in his old age by his sons.

The levirate is practised, the junior levirate being more common than the senior levirate. The brother raises seed to the deceased and takes over the responsibility of a father and husband though the children he begets are counted as belonging to his deceased brother. Frequently the heir, eldest son of the chief 'house' inherits a young wife of his father. In this case, similarly, the children born of the union are looked upon as the deceased's, i.e., as brothers and sisters of the heir, not his children. The sororate also is practised in all its forms, sororal polygyny being very common. Where a sister is sent to 'awaken the house (*ho dsosa ndo*)' of a barren or deceased wife full bride-price is due for her although, since bride-price is never an absolutely fixed amount, less may be asked for than in the first marriage.

The marriage of a woman transfers to her husband's group the right to her labour. Initially it is the husband's mother even more than the husband himself that benefits, as we shall

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see. But the fruits of her labour go to swell the property only of that unit of the lineage which constitutes the wife's own 'house', the independence and rights of which must be respected even by the husband.

Bride-price generally consists of some five to eight head of cattle, a number of goats and money (to the extent of at least £5). Today people sometimes pay a sum of money instead of cattle—£40 in a recent marriage. This represents eight head of cattle, bride-price cattle having been regarded as equivalent to £5 each, irrespectively of market prices, for the past fifty years at least. The amount given is, however, never a fixed one as the passing of bride-price initiates a continuous relationship of gift exchange between the two families concerned and the marriage puts the bridegroom under a lifelong obligation to extend economic help to his wife's people. '*Monoalo a o fedi*—bride-price is never completed', it is said. When the wife's people have to pay a fine, if they need cattle or goats for the marriage of a son, they will approach their *tsetse* (or *mudukulu*)—son-in-law. The man who has provided a wife has given something 'bigger than cattle' and is in this sense in a superior position. On the other hand the son-in-law (*mudukulu*) or wife-receiver is accorded great honour by his wife's people and once a year at least receives a gift of beer and grain. The relationship is one of reciprocity and the son-in-law must for his part also show respect for his wife's people. He must ever be ready to grant their requests and may never refuse. There is no evidence for Leach's suggestion that the Lobedu have a 'kind of Kachin structure in reverse' with a 'strong tendency for the wife-receiving group to rank the higher'.[1] In endogamous unions in the Lobedu royal group both husband and wife may be members of the same lineage. Lobedu society is, moreover, not a stratified society though the royal lineage enjoys great prestige.

Fully to understand Lobedu marriage one must approach it also from the point of view of the woman. Usually a uterine brother marries a wife with the cattle that have accrued from his sister's marriage. This sometimes happens in other tribes too. But where the Lobedu situation seems to be distinctive is that every woman whose marriage-cattle have been used to

[1] Leach, 1951.

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provide a bride, whether for a brother or other relative or even a stranger, has a moral right to a daughter-in-law from the 'house' established by her cattle. Even though it was her husband who provided the cattle and it is usually he who is said to be 'following the tracks of his cattle' when such a girl is obtained for his son, the wife's right to the services of the girl are such that even if the husband himself, instead of the son, were to marry this girl (which quite often is the case, i.e., wife's brother's daughter marriage) this bride would be attached to her house and would cook for her as though she were the mother-in-law.

So strong is a woman's moral right to her cattle-linked brother's daughter to come and cook for her in her old age that even if she has no son she can, especially if her husband is dead, 'marry' the girl herself, using a daughter's bride-price. The Lobedu themselves phrase it as marriage of a woman to a woman. In reality it is in this case the marriage of a girl to a fictitious son of the woman who is said to be marrying her. Such a bride is called *noeji* (daughter-in-law) by the woman, who is 'grandmother', to any children born to the girl. The children take the surname of the husband of the woman just as though her son had married the girl. A woman who practises as a doctor and earns money can marry a girl with her own cattle. Here too the children (whether by an allocated man or born 'in the bush') take the lineage name of the husband of the woman who 'married' their mother. They are of his lineage but belong essentially to the 'house' (*mosha*) of the woman who married their mother.

A woman may also 'marry' a girl on behalf of her own lineage —for a deceased or non-existent brother. This is done where an heir is needed or where a brother has died before marrying the girl who was 'born for' or engaged to him as in the case of Thepize in Figure 1.

It is the source of the cattle that pass which determines the lineage to which the children belong in woman-marriage. Should the cattle come from the 'house' of a married woman the children belong to the husband's lineage; if they come from the family of procreation of the woman the children take her father's surname. The queen and women who rule districts on behalf of a deceased or non-existent brother are called 'husband'

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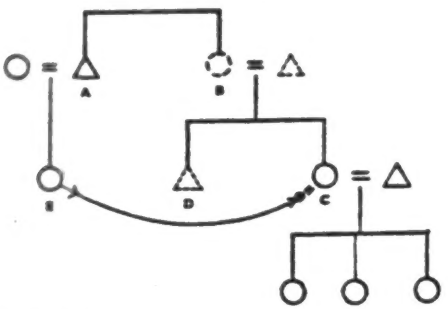


FIG. 1. Case illustrating 'marriage' of a woman to a woman.

Thepize's father (A) was the cattle-linked, uterine brother of (B) the mother of Mandike (C), a married woman with children. Mandike's brother (D), whose parents were dead, had been engaged to Thepize (E), his mother's brother's daughter, and cattle had already passed when he, too, died. So Thepize's father (A) took his daughter (E) to Mandike (C), and said: 'Take Thepize and "stay" with her'. So, as it was phrased, Mandike 'married' Thepize (*o mo bekile*), who came to live in Mandike's husband's village. Mandike (C) called Thepize (E) not '*noeji*' (daughter-in-law) but '*mohadibo*' (sister-in-law); E's children called C '*rakhadi*' (father's sister) and took her father's surname.

(*monna wa ka*) by their 'wives' *batanoni* when they marry on behalf of their own lineage and *papa* (father) by the children of these wives, just as though they were men. In ritual matters, however, they act as women.

Preferential marriage with the mother's brother's daughter appears in the Lobedu context almost to follow from relationships established by the cattle that pass and the rights of the sister to a daughter-in-law from whoever has used her marriage cattle. Yet it is not always from the identical 'house' that was established by the cattle that a daughter is sent in marriage, nor necessarily by the same brother as used the cattle. Maseriba's bride-price was used by her brother Andrew. Thirty years later (1961) when she went to ask for a girl to 'come and stamp for her' (she is a widow and has no sons) it was the daughter of Batamedi, her other uterine brother, that was offered. When

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asked about this the reply was not as I expected it to be, that Andrew's daughters were attending school and would be averse to such a marriage but 'we just gave Kewele to Maseriba because she is *khadi* (i.e., sister in a ritual sense) and "to knit together the family" (*ho ruka leloko*)'. This desire to keep alive the links between brother and sister and to maintain and renew marriage links with women of the lineage from one generation to another is very strong. The marriage of a woman at her father's sister's (i.e., mother's brother's daughter marriage) is called '*ho dzosa moloko*'—to awaken or renew relationship.

There are several variations of mother's brother's daughter marriage that arise from or are bound up with obligations connected with cattle that have passed. If in the case of cattle-linked brother and sister (D and C in Figure 2a), the latter has a daughter but no son who could marry her brother's daughter, she might, rather than break the link with her brother and allow her husband to use the cattle to create new links with strangers, nevertheless, with the agreement and consent of her husband, hand over her daughter E's bride-price to her brother D so that he can marry a second wife and establish a 'house' from which her daughter E may claim a woman later to marry her son and to 'come and cook for her'. Here marriage (of F to G) is with the mother's mother's brother's daughter. When such girl is actually married bride-price will again pass. If, in such a marriage, the woman were to run away or if there were a divorce, both bride-prices could be claimed, as we saw in the 1930's. Today, however, probably as a result of European administrative policy, only one bride-price is paid back, though it is commonly known that both used to be returned.

Besides marriage with the mother's mother's brother's daughter, other variations of mother's brother's daughter marriage are found, such as marriage with the mother's brother's son's daughter (one generation below), with the father's mother's brother's daughter or even with a father's mother's brother's son's daughter.

The fact that in the above example of marriage with the mother's mother's brother's daughter two lots of bride-price are handed over yet only one bride is received, indicates that the economic aspect is not paramount; it is the permanent link

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between descendants of brother and sister that is valued. In cases where a man has received cattle on the 'security' of a small girl, to all appearances a predominantly economic transaction, the creditor also hands over cattle a second time when the girl comes over to be married. This is puzzling. When asked about it the Lobedu usually quote the proverb '*mobula ndo oa nywala*—the opener or establisher of a "house" pays marriage cattle', i.e., every girl commands bride-price. The explanation possibly lies in regarding the passing of property in the case of wife No. 2 of D in Figure 2a and also the first handing over of property in an economic transaction on the security of a girl as the creation of a cattle-link similar to handing over to a brother the bride-price of his sister to acquire

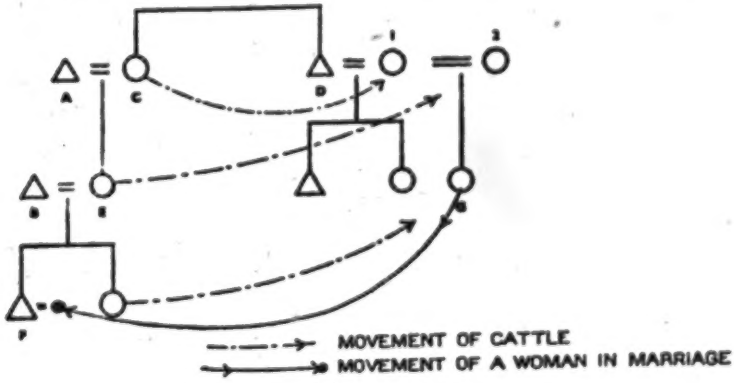


FIG. 2A.

a wife. The subsequent transactions are then on a par with ordinary preferential marriage between the children of cattle-linked brother and sister.

If, in contrast to the case illustrated in Figure 2a where the cattle-linked sister has no son to marry her brother's daughter, it is the brother who has no daughter to give in marriage to his sister's son then sometimes, as in a recent case, the preferred marriage takes place in the next generation. Here (see Figure 2b) the daughter (G) of the son of C's cattle-linked half-brother (D) married the son (F) of the son of the cattle-linked sister (C). In this case E had a brother to use her cattle and there was no need for her cattle to be sent to the mother's brother to establish a new 'house' or 'open a gate', as it is sometimes phrased.

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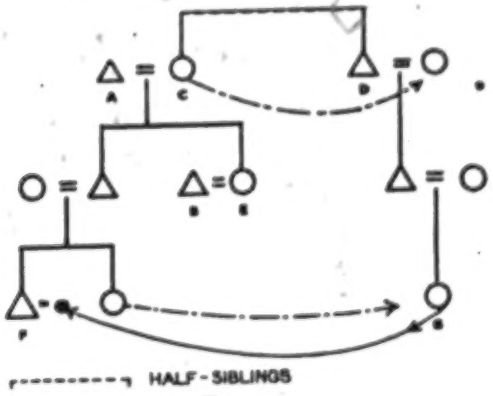


FIG. 2B.

Once a marriage has taken place, even where originating in an economic arrangement, the relationship is self-perpetuating as is shown in Sedena's case. Sedena's elder brother (A in Figure 3) used the bride-price of their only sister; so when Makeakati, his daughter (C), was born this elder brother said to Sedena (B), 'There are your cattle', indicating his baby daughter. When the girl was eight years old and her father already dead, Sedena (B) took her to Mogodo (D), a relative (a classificatory 'sister's son', descendant of his father's half-brother), and, indicating that she was his *ledolo*, asked for cattle to marry a wife. He was given cattle which he used to marry Marita (E). In due course when Makeakati (C) grew up she was sent to marry Mogodo (D), who gave five head of cattle as bride-price (five to eight is the usual amount). Many years later Marita's only daughter, Mojaji (F), followed her 'sister'

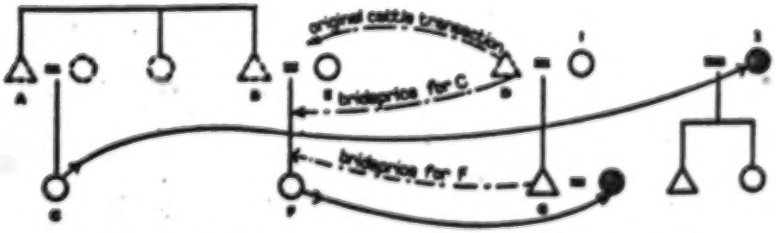


FIG. 3. Preferential marriages arising out of an economic arrangement.

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and married Nakampe (G), Mogodo's son by another wife. Makeakati's (C's) 'house' had first claim on the daughter of the man (her father's brother) who had used her cattle, but as her son was a Christian the girl was given to the son of a different 'house'.

Once a link has been created by a marriage a bride-giving-bride-receiving relationship follows, which tends to be reinforced not only by one but by numerous subsequent marriages. Thus, A married a girl from lineage B. Both his sons and his grandson followed in his footsteps (see Figure 4).

The same tendency is present in Lobedu polygyny where the sororate is very popular. Most Lobedu who are not Christians have more than one wife. But it will almost always be found

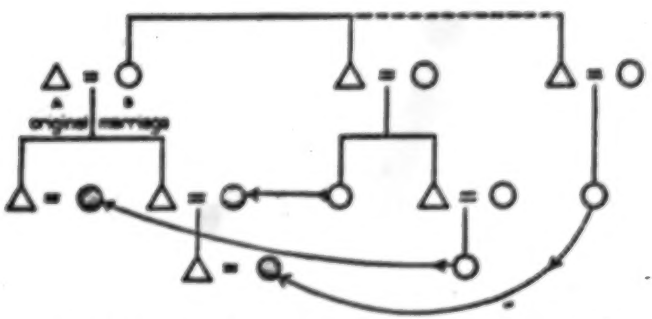


FIG. 4. Reinforcement down the generations of a marriage link between two lineages.

that at least one is a sister or younger relative of one of the other wives. Thus M, a chief councillor, married seven wives: (1) his mother's uterine brother's daughter; (2) his mother's half-brother's daughter; (3) his mother's half-brother's daughter's son's daughter; (4) a non-relative; (5) a non-relative; (6) his mother's brother's son's daughter (brother's daughter to No. 2 and therefore a wife's brother's daughter); (7) a sister to (1) by the same father but a different mother.

S, a man in his thirties, has three wives: (1) his mother's mother's brother's daughter; (2) a non-relative and (3) the uterine sister of his first wife.

Old K had five wives: (1) his mother's uterine brother's

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daughter; (2) his father's mother's brother's daughter; (3) a distant relative of his mother's; (4) his mother's fellow-wife's brother's daughter; (5) a sister to his first wife by the same father but a different mother.

*Divorce*

The use of a woman's bride-price by her brother, and the interest which his cattle-linked sister has in maintaining this 'house' in which her son will find a wife, made divorce difficult in the old days. Today, however, partly owing to migrant labour, divorce is more common and girls, especially in the case of arranged marriages with old men or cross-cousins, quite frequently run away to a lover either before or after the marriage knowing that they cannot any longer be forced to return. A return of the bride-price is not always insisted upon, as in the case of A who chased away his childless wife for being a thief. Her brother had used the cattle so A was satisfied to accept the arrangement that the brother should give his daughter in marriage to A's son by another wife. When there are complicated cattle claims a husband, especially if he is already old, may find it wiser not to press for a divorce if a wife absconds. P's third wife, who had been procured with the bride-price of the daughter of his first wife ran home with her three children and began to lead a promiscuous life during which a fourth child was born. Beyond trying to persuade her people to make her return, P did nothing. The children, two girls and two boys, were his and his first wife had a claim on the bride-price of one of the girls. Eventually, when the two daughters were married, P secured their bride-price; the two sons earned their own marriage-cattle by working; and when P died, the eldest son of that 'house' was called to come and receive his share of the inheritance.

The rule in Lobedu divorce was, in the old days, that the husband's family should receive back the full bride-price plus all increase, irrespective of where the blame lay, in accordance with the saying, '*monila mobe o beya le noto ea kwe*—even the bad workman (husband) returns with his tools'. The children went with their mother to her people and when she remarried, the new husband had a right to all of them. With European

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With European
administration came the introduction of the Pedi idea that a man has a claim to both the cattle and the children in the case of malicious desertion. Old men in the 1930's called this a white man's law; today people are claiming it as a Lobedu custom. Only two of the oldest men at court were able to tell me in 1962 what had been common knowledge in 1936. The present custom is for the husband on receiving back the bride-price to return some of it (one beast for each child or sometimes two for a girl) for the rearing of the younger children that remain temporarily with their mother. A father's hold over such children is in practice tenuous though the court will always uphold his claims.

The issues in divorce are rarely simple. The simplest case I came across was one in which a man became insane. His wife left with her children to live with her brother who returned the bride-price. Usually, however, there are endless complications and cases continue for months, even years. If, for example, a man chases his wife and children away and the wife wants to return, he may in the end lose both the children and the bride-price despite the proverb quoted above.

### *The Domestic Group and the Importance of the 'House'*

We have discussed the role of property in establishing and maintaining marriage relationships and links between families. Control over material resources also plays an important part in the structure of the polygynous domestic group with its economically independent 'houses' so characteristic of the Lobedu.

As head of the family the husband has full control over all family resources. Yet each wife forms with her children a unit of production and consumption, the independence of which as against other 'houses' has to be respected even by the husband, whose control thus becomes limited the moment he marries a second wife. This is why a Christian woman among the Lobedu never has the economic independence that a woman in a polygynous household has. There are safeguards against the infringement of the principle of the independence of the 'house', as we shall see.

Though women do most of the cultivation, the Lobedu

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## LOBEDU PROPERTY, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Though women do most of the cultivation, the Lobedu husband is expected to play his part in producing food for his family. Every married man, therefore, has a field of his own which he cultivates with the help of his wives. The produce of this field is used for any beer- or work-parties that the man may wish to give and is a kind of bank upon which his wives may draw when they run short. If, however, a man helps one wife from his personal stores he must give all his wives an equal amount irrespective of their needs. When he first marries, the husband works with his wife in their common field. On marrying a second wife he acquires a field of his own (in addition to the one for his new wife) which his wives take it in turn to weed. It is said that if he had no field of his own but were merely to help each wife in turn to cultivate her field there would be endless trouble in maintaining equality between them. One of them for instance might say, 'How is it that when you come and work in my field you just sit but when you go to the field of the mother of So and So even the shade doesn't tempt you!'

A father is responsible for helping his sons to marry. But since a man seldom possesses cattle other than those already involved in bride-price exchange and a son uses the cattle of his sister, boys in a 'house' in which there are no girls often have to go out and work or with the help and advice of their father acquire bride-price in other ways. In the old days an orphan usually hired out his services to carry salt or iron ore from far countries in order in this way to acquire marriage hoes or cattle. Expenses in goats and money over and above the cattle given in marriage are met by the boy himself with the help of his father. A father should see to it that his son is provided with a field when he marries but in practice it is very often the mother who concerns herself with this problem. The father has jural control over his sons and is responsible for their debts.

The wives in a polygynous household differ in status. The chief wife is the daughter of the mother's brother—the cattle-linked or any uterine mother's brother or mother's half-brother. She will bear the heir and future head of the village. Where there has been no marriage with the mother's brother's daughter it is the first wife, the one married with his father's cattle that is chief wife. A chief wife exercises no control over

other wives. When the mother's brother's daughter is one of the younger wives in a polygynous household she may be completely overshadowed by the first wife. The eldest son of the first wife occupies a position of importance in the family. He is said to stand in the shoes (literally 'footprints') of his father and after the latter's death has a right to be *suma'd*, i.e., given a portion of any animal killed by any of his brothers long after they have dispersed and live in separate homesteads. There are instances, especially in the case of district heads and where the chief house has no male heir, in which the eldest son of the first wife married tries to usurp the position. But though he may appear for a time to be succeeding as seemed to be the case in more than one instance in the 1930's when first we went into the field, I have not come across any cases in which he has succeeded in the long run.

Each wife has her own fields which it is her duty to cultivate for the needs of her 'house'. On her death her sons have first right to inherit her fields unless their father wants to use them himself or arrange for their cultivation to provide food for the younger children; but they may not be used for the benefit of any other 'house'. A daughter may be given her deceased mother's field to cultivate while she is still in her parental home, but she cannot inherit it. A wife is expected to feed herself, her children, her husband and her mother-in-law from her fields. Each time she cooks she sends food to her husband and to his mother. What is left must be returned to her 'house' unless the husband himself gives it to the herd-boys or other children as a group. In the case of special dishes eaten in-between meals, such as cakes of sesamum or ground peanuts, a little will be sent to each of the other women of the homestead with whom the wife is on good terms. In a large homestead this may be confined to the wives of one man. Beer brought to any one 'house' is usually drunk by all in the village and neighbourhood.

In addition to having her own granaries and cooking utensils every wife has a right to raise livestock. She may keep chickens; she may acquire goats by the exchange of her produce; she may get pigs by feeding other people's pigs in return for a pigling. She may even acquire cattle if she is a doctor. In contrast to the Zulu, where the 'house' like that of the Lobedu is

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also an economic unit, the Lobedu wife enjoys considerable economic freedom in the disposal of her property. Though she should act in consultation with her husband in the disposal of livestock or large amounts of surplus crops she will often, especially if on bad terms with her husband, act on her own. All these activities, it should however be remembered, are for the advancement of her 'house', which belongs to the husband's lineage. These goods can neither accrue to nor be used by the wife's own relatives. If, for example, she leaves her husband or is divorced she cannot take any of the produce of her fields with her. On the other hand the husband could use such crops or livestock only for the advancement or to feed the children of that 'house,' not for other 'houses'. The only goods a woman may take with her on divorce are cattle or other livestock earned by practising as a doctor because in this case, it is said, she has spirits guiding her which are of her own, not her husband's family.

The Lobedu husband does not in the manner of the Nguni allocate cattle to the 'house' of each wife (milk plays little or no part in the diet). It is said, however, that even if a cow were to be allocated to a house for milking purposes it would not belong to that 'house'. Cattle that come in from the marriage of a daughter are the property of her mother's 'house' and should be used for acquiring a wife for a son of that house. If the son is young and the husband wishes to use his daughter's cattle for a wife for himself, such wife would have to cook for the woman of that house from which the cattle came in the manner of a daughter-in-law. In theory a husband has the right to decide how the cattle of any 'house' are to be used. But he rarely in practice acts against the wishes of the wife. Her right over any woman acquired by the cattle of her daughter gives her great power and makes it difficult for her husband to marry a wife with them himself against her wishes. The bride might run away or her people refuse to let her marry if they hear that the woman the bride will have to 'stamp for' opposes the marriage. That is why so often cattle are handed to the wife's brother in the manner described above.

It is said, '*mosha ha o le yo mongwe*—houses do not eat one another', i.e., the property of one house cannot be used for the advancement of another. Hence bride-price of the girl of one

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house should not be used by the son of another house. If this is done (as it sometimes is if one wife has only daughters and another only sons) this immediately establishes a new relationship between half-brother and sister who now become cattle-linked; and the girl whose cattle were used has the right to 'follow the tracks of her cattle' to ask for a daughter-in-law from that 'house'.

A 'house' is never wholly dependent in economic matters on the husband and his lineage. It has other possible sources to exploit. Thus a married woman may, and often does, get fields from her own people to cultivate. The difference between these fields and those given by her husband's people is that the latter are hers as a right and are inherited by her sons; the former she obtains through the goodwill of her blood-kin and on her death they revert back to them unless the children are still young and the fields are needed to feed them. Similarly, though it is the father's duty and responsibility to help his sons to marry and though uterine brothers always help one another, a man who has a married sister very often turns to her husband or to the sister's son for help with cattle to marry a wife. There is a difference, however, between help given by a uterine brother and that given by a relative on the mother's side or an affine—a brother does not expect to be repaid but help from other categories of relative becomes converted into a marriage bond or has to be repaid. The close bond between uterine brothers is indicated in the saying 'uterine brothers share even the head of a locust'.

Each 'house' is distinguished, then, from that of other wives of the husband by its cattle-links and obligations to the wife's side of the family (and later the daughters' husbands' families) and by dependence on ancestors on the mother's (i.e., wife's) side in addition to those on the father's side.

In the case of preferential marriage, too, the 'house' is all-important. Here, in contrast to marriage with strangers where the boy's family initiates negotiations, the first approach is usually made by the girl's people who bring the matter in the first instance to their sister, the woman of the 'house' concerned. Thus, for example, when Dumedi obtained cattle from the marriage of his eldest daughter by his first wife (a mother's brother's daughter) her people approached his mother

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suggesting that as the first wife was not strong they should send her uterine sister as a little 'follower' to help her. Finding that her son was agreeable she reported the matter to his eldest half-brother, head of the homestead, who discussed the matter with his brothers.

The ultimate guarantor of the interests and economic independence of the 'house' is the cattle-linked sister with whose bride-price the wife was obtained. As we have seen, she occupies a very special position in the 'house' built by her cattle. Even before her brother's bridal party arrives at his homestead with the new bride she is taken to his married sister's homestead where a goat is slaughtered for her in recognition of their special relationship. When the sister visits her old home she will 'put down her things' and make herself at home in the hut of this wife of her brother. She is the first to be called to beer there; she must be invited to all activities such as work-parties held by the 'house'; all sickness is reported to her; she is called in to discuss the marriage of all sons and daughters of that 'house'. She or her eldest uterine sister is the one who magically protects a new homestead by drawing a medicated branch in a magical circle around it. If her father and mother are dead she sees to it that her brother treats his wife properly. He cannot chase her away or divorce her unless his sister believes his action to be justifiable; and she may, and very often does, take her brother's wife to live with her in her husband's village if he ill-treats her. She has an interest in this 'house' for here her son will find a wife. When her brother dies it is she and her sisters who will distribute the inheritance. The sanction for her control is a religious one: if she is 'dissatisfied in her heart' this may 'stir up the ancestors' and cause a child of her brother to be ill—a very powerful weapon.

*Development of a House*

Let us consider the growth and development of a house for it is only by a very gradual process that a house reaches full stature. The marriage of every woman marks the birth of a new unit which may become in time an independent homestead though it does not always do so. This is possible at the earliest only when the eldest son has married a wife and

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592 often, if at all, only after the death of both the father and his
571 heir, the eldest brother who succeeded him as head of the homestead. Full independence is not an ideal that is striven for.

592 In its early stages the new unit or incipient 'house' is still
571 dependent on the bridegroom's natal house (house of orienta-
593 tion). The new bride works for her mother-in-law. She has no
606 fields of her own to begin with, no utensils, nor a hearth and very often not even a sleeping hut of her own, the young couple using the mother-in-law's sleeping hut while she sleeps in her kitchen hut. The bride cooks on her husband's mother's hearth, works with her husband in a field allocated to them and helps her mother-in-law in hers. The husband will, if he has not done so before bringing his bride home, build her a new hut after the marriage at any time convenient to him. Simeon made sun-dried bricks himself, paid one pound to have the walls built, had a work-party for the framework of the roof and did the thatching himself. A man's father may help him but usually a young man uses his own money earned by previous migrant labour.

A woman cooks for her mother-in-law until a new bride, either of her husband's brother or of her husband arrives when she may be given her own pots. When Simeon's second wife arrived both wives cooked together for the mother-in-law for a while. Then when they began to disagree one (the younger one in this case because she was unrelated) was given her own pots to cook separately. Being given her own hearth is an important thing in a woman's married life marked by a little ceremony and a visit home to announce her new status. Even when she has her own hearth, however, she must continue to provide food for her parents-in-law. Children are thus an insurance against old age and it is the duty and responsibility of a son, more particularly the youngest son, to care for his mother in her old age. The father may have young wives to care for him when his elder sons are married.

593 Even after his marriage a man remains under the jural control
591 of, and subordinate to, his father. Only after his father's death
591 is he free to choose whether to remain in the village under the heir or to hive off. Sometimes, though rarely, a married son does, however, quarrel with his father and move away. Mostly

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such a quarrel involves the mother rather than the son and the whole house hives off, the son taking his mother with him.

The birth of the first child is an important step in the development of a house. The Lobedu child is born in a homestead in which there are at least three generations represented—that of the grandmother, that of the parents, including usually also the father's brothers and unmarried sisters and that of his own contemporaries. The first child is tended largely by the father's mother while the mother goes about the hard work of stamping, working in the fields, fetching firewood if there are no young sisters of the husband to help, and cooking.

The husband's mother is an essential part of the household and has a dominating influence. She controls and advises her son, especially in regard to his relations with his wife and the needs of his children, and he usually defers to her knowledge and experience. Long after her sons are married and even when they have grandchildren the unit is known as her *mosha* (house). It would seem that a unit of husband, wife and child would hardly be viable in a subsistence economy based predominantly on the agricultural activities of the women. Even the smallest Lobedu homestead includes the husband's mother. It is only when there are several adolescent children or the cash earnings of the husband enable a wife to buy the staple food instead of relying wholly upon what she grows herself that smaller units can survive. Even then they generally live near, and attach themselves to, some relative.

Once children are born, the wife's brother (mother's brother to the children) begins to play a part in forging links between them and the relatives on the mother's side. He will give gifts to the sister's son (*muduhulu*) who often goes to stay for a while with his mother's people; and in his turn the sister's son whenever he returns from migrant labour will be expected to give a gift to his mother's brother. Sometimes he also helps a mother's brother with cattle to marry. As the size of a man's family increases more fields may be needed to feed the children and very often these are obtained by the wife from her own people.

The marriage of the first daughter brings about the first acquisition by the developing house of a large amount of property in bride-price and ensures, even in the absence of sons, the continuation of the house. As important is the fact

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592 that the man has now a son-in-law, whom he can approach for
571 economic help whenever he is in need. His wife, too, if she
606 needs anything can brew beer to take as *khirola* for her son-in-law, or crack open *morula* nuts and take them as a gift, in return for which he will give her money or whatever he can. *Khirola* may be taken even to the uterine brother of a son-in-law for
[602] he also is a *muduhulu*. A man looks more and more to his affines for economic help as his father ages and his brothers become involved in their own commitments. To the wife the marriage of her daughter is also very important for a different reason. This makes it possible for her to have a daughter-in-law. For on the marriage of her son a woman stops cooking and in addition has the help of her daughter-in-law in her garden work. If she has no son she can in the last resort always use the bride-price to 'marry' a girl herself who will relieve her of the most heavy and onerous household and agricultural work.

592 With the marriage of his sons there is a gradual handing
571 over of the reins to the younger generation which is completed by the man's death, when the eldest son of his chief wife takes over his position and responsibilities. This is the point at which the house achieves its final independence economically (though not ritually).

613 It is interesting to note that Lobedu do not, like the Zulu,
562 identify a lineage segment by its female foundress.

*Death and Inheritance*

768 On the death of a wife her husband must administer the affairs
593 of her 'house' to its best advantage. If the children have any
[604] complaints they may, if their grandparents are dead, make them to the father's cattle-linked sister or to his eldest uterine sister who has considerable influence as 'priestess' of the family.
[583] If the father marries a woman with the cattle of the daughter of such a 'house' such wife will be attached to this house and the sons of the house could use the marriage cattle of the daughters of this woman to obtain wives.

768 When a married woman dies leaving very young children they are generally sent either to the mother's mother or to her sister to be reared. M's son and son's wife died in close succession leaving very young children. Shortly after, when his own

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wife also died, he sent the children to her sister to be reared and gave her his deceased's wife's fields to cultivate to provide food for the children. When they are big they will be brought back with a gift of beer and their father will give a thanking gift of an ox or money for the rearing of the children.

The utensils of a deceased wife remain in her hut to be used by her children or son's wives; and her eldest son has the right to inherit her fields. Until twenty years ago when it was still the custom for a mother to receive a cow and calf on the marriage of her daughter (if a virgin) in recognition of having reared her, this portion of the bride-price was the special inheritance of the youngest son with whom she generally lived until her death.

When the father of a polygynous family or the head of a homestead dies there is, owing to the property arrangements characteristic of the Lobedu and their attitude to its possession, never a great deal of heritable property. The property of each house is inherited by the eldest son of that house. The heir to the position of head of the homestead is the eldest son of the chief wife. Only he or the uterine brothers of his father are responsible for his father's debts—not the sons of other houses. It is generally stated in discussions that any cattle or goods acquired by the father as his personal possessions should be inherited by the chief son and heir. In practice it is more common to divide out such property among all the sons and daughters.

When Ramalepe, a rain doctor, died about three years ago all his cattle and goods were divided equally among his sons. His rain medicines and his field went to his chief wife's son; his mealies (from his own field) were equally divided between his wives and his uterine sisters. When Philip's father died there was no sister of his father still living so Philip went to the queen and asked her what to do. She told him to call his sisters and to divide out the property in consultation with them. He then called his sisters (eldest and other daughters of his father) and showed them the property—thirty-six goats. They agreed on dividing the goats as follows: the deceased's two elder daughters by his first wife were given ten goats each; Philip, a son by the second wife, received eight; Mutzere, sister's son to deceased, was given one goat to kill and eat at his home; one goat was

428 given to the son of deceased's youngest wife who had deserted one goat was
[586] him; two goats were killed for the widow of the deceased's eldest son by his first wife when she came from Johannesburg to pay a visit of condolence. Deceased's field was a *leshupe*, a site of their previous village, and as is the custom with such a field, was divided between his wives. His mealies were equally divided between all his wives, his own daughters who were present at the ceremony also receiving some. In the case of Mathekha, all his cattle were given by the *khadi* (his sister) to his eldest son by his chief wife, a man who was a prominent councillor of the queen. It was understood they would be used for helping his brothers and half-brothers to marry. The old man's blankets and money were divided among all his children, the elder ones receiving £1 10s. 0d., the smaller ones only 10s.

[587] The wives of a deceased man if they are still of childbearing age are allocated to his brothers or, in the case of a very young wife, sometimes to the chief son and heir. It is his responsibility
[765] to hold the family together after the death of his father. The division of the property is made on the day of purification from mourning (*khitshila*) about a year after the death when all the
428 relatives have gathered together. The person responsible for
429 the division of the inheritance in property and wives is the eldest uterine sister of the deceased who acts in consultation with her sisters, especially the cattle-linked sister of the deceased. If there is no uterine sister the deceased's eldest daughter takes her place. She will act in consultation with her father's
[587] brother if one is still alive. In allocating wives some consideration is generally given to the wishes of the parties concerned.

429 When the heir is a minor, a brother of the deceased, usually the one who inherits the mother of the heir, may be chosen to act as regent. But he must be careful to act only in consultation
634 with the *khadi*. In many instances in the case of the death of a
429 district head when the *khadi* (sister of deceased) is old or a
562 widow and free to leave her husband's homestead she may
[588] herself come to rule in her brother's village. When M. died,
[692] the son of his chief wife was still a child so his uterine sister, a widow, came to rule, while the younger half-brother of the deceased returned from another area where he had been living to set up his village near by in order to raise seed to his half-brother by the chief wife and help his half-sister by conducting the court cases.

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the court cases. Later, when the heir came of age, a new homestead was built. When Mabulana died in the 1940's his daughter, a married woman who does not live in the area was made official district head. Her mother's brother came specially from the Capital to live in the area and help her by conducting cases.

The mother's brother is considered to be eminently suitable as adviser to a ruler. The queen, too, traditionally has a mother's brother as chief councillor. A mother's brother has no claim to succession yet is deeply interested in the welfare of his sister's child. He will see to it that the sister's child gets his rights. The position of the son of the *khadi* who is acting as regent is somewhat different. There is a Lobedu proverb saying '*Bya thoga monye bo dula muduhulu*—where a master is lacking there sits the nephew'. And it is true that the son of a woman regent is often ruler in all but name. In the 1930's there were two blatant cases in which the rightful heirs of district heads who had long reached man's estate seemed in danger of permanently being ousted. In both cases in the long run when the *khadi* died the rightful heir was installed, in one of the cases on the expressed dying wish of the *khadi*. Right seems to prevail in the long run.

### *The Homestead Through Time*

Basically a homestead consists of a group of 'houses' belonging to the wives of the head or of the head and his half-brothers. Other relatives may attach themselves to it but the core remains the group of agnates.

Many of the smaller homesteads that have all the appearance of being independent are found upon investigation to be portions (a 'house') of a neighbouring homestead, which has become separated in space but still considers itself part and acknowledges the authority and control of the senior homestead near by. The most obvious case of this arises where, owing to quarrels between co-wives, a husband has placed one of the wives in a homestead of her own and visits her there. If a wife has a married son then in the event of serious quarrels there is more likely to be a hiving off, the son moving to a different area with his mother and siblings.

In Figure 5 a very small homestead is shown. Here the

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woman, K, has, during her husband's prolonged absence in a labour centre, moved away from her fellow wives into another district in order to be near her married daughter. She lives in a small homestead with her married son, who is absent doing migrant labour, and her other children. In contrast to this is the homestead of a neighbour of hers who has five wives and

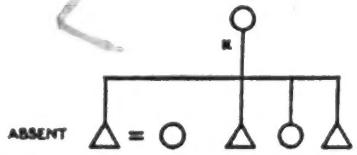


FIG. 5. Composition of a very small homestead.

whose ten brothers together with their wives and children still live with him in the homestead—a total of sixty-eight inmates (twenty-nine adults, thirty-nine children). Of these three married and two unmarried men are away doing migrant labour.

The domestic group indicated in Figure 6 originally lived in one homestead.

On A's death his chief son, B, inherited his youngest wife (No. 3) who as yet had no children. They all moved out of the old homestead, the sons (B and D) of A's two elder wives

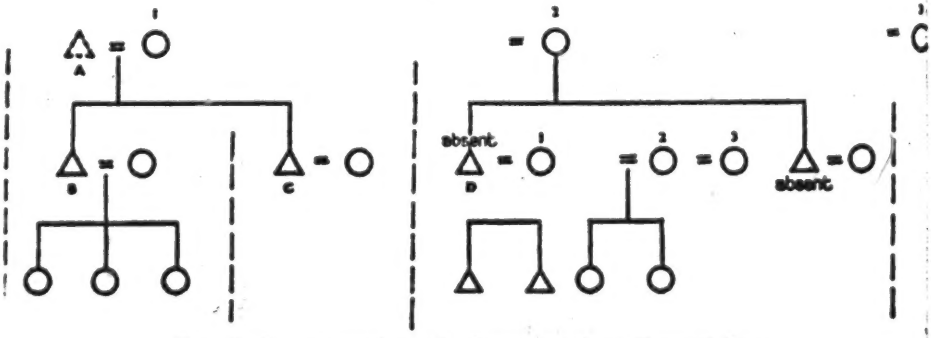


FIG. 6. Segmentation of a homestead on 'house' lines.

building separate homesteads next to one another, where I found them in 1938. The women in the homestead of D considered themselves part of the homestead of A and in the

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absence of their menfolk at labour centres, reported everything that took place to B. Later C moved away from his uterine brother B and in 1961 there were three separate homesteads.

The cleavage in a homestead then is on 'house' lines, though uterine brothers living together after the death of their father also eventually separate. The break may be the result of an accusation of witchcraft or there may be an amicable separation as in the case described above. Reasons for separating vary: Batamedi moved away from his uterine brother, a district headman, to satisfy political ambitions—he hoped to be made headman of an area to which his family had an ancient claim; Poke, a married man, left the homestead of his brother with his mother and siblings for health reasons, suspecting that someone in the homestead might be bewitching him and hoping that a change would improve his condition. After many years in a different district, he returned to live in the original homestead. Sons do not move away before the death of their father unless there has been a quarrel in which their mothers are involved, or unless they become Christians and marry Christian girls. Even the death of the father does not necessarily bring about the separation of his sons; brothers and half-brothers may live together for years. As they marry more wives the size of the families increases, the homestead becomes more congested, the likelihood of quarrels greater and gradually the 'houses' move asunder. If half-brothers and brothers have not separated before, then the final break-up of the old homestead will come with the death of the eldest brother. For it is rare for a man to live under a young heir of the generation below him. Close religious and social ties, however, persist long after separation. Half-brothers continue to 'inherit' each other's wives and there may be a good deal of co-operation in work-parties and much consultation in family affairs. Lobedu homesteads are stable over long periods and there is a great value attached to remaining together.

*Preferential Marriage down the Generations*

The development of the 'houses' in a homestead, leading to the gradual segmentation of the domestic group and separation of

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its males is counter-balanced by a 'knitting' together of the men with their sisters who have married out and a strengthening of their ties with their maternal kin by means of preferential marriage supported by cattle links. This process is illustrated in Figure 9.

The proportion of mother's brother's daughter marriages in its various forms to the total number of marriages among two generations of members of a large lineage which was analysed in detail (counting the marriage of each woman in a polygynous union as a separate marriage) was 34 per cent, of which 91 per cent were marriages with the mother's uterine brother and its derivations. If married men were to be considered, the proportion would be higher, 63 per cent of the married men having contracted at least one mother's brother's daughter marriage; 80 per cent of these were (or were based on) marriage with the mother's uterine brother's daughter. This tallies with a random sample of 100 cases taken in 1936 in the royal area (excluding the Capital itself) in which 67 per cent of the married men were found to have married a mother's brother's daughter. But the situation had materially altered by 1962 when a similar sample of 243 cases in the same area showed mother's brother's daughter marriages to have decreased from 67 per cent to 34 per cent. Of these 94 per cent were with the mother's uterine brother or his descendants, which indicates that despite strong forces making for change and increased opportunities for contacts with strangers of the opposite sex which have greatly diminished marriage with distant maternal kin, the values attached to 'knitting' together close relatives are still strong. The most potent forces at work for breaking down preferential marriage are Christianity, which condemns it and school education which by inculcating Western values makes preferential marriage unthinkable to any school child today however short a period he has spent at school.

That men consciously use marriage to keep alive family relationships and that they are deeply concerned about these alliances, can be seen from the case of Modidi (M) in Figure 7.

M's homestead abutted on that of V, whose half-sister K he had married (see Figure 7). When they were both old. M took his granddaughter L, (his son by V's half-sister K having died years before) to his friend V saying, 'I see we are in danger of

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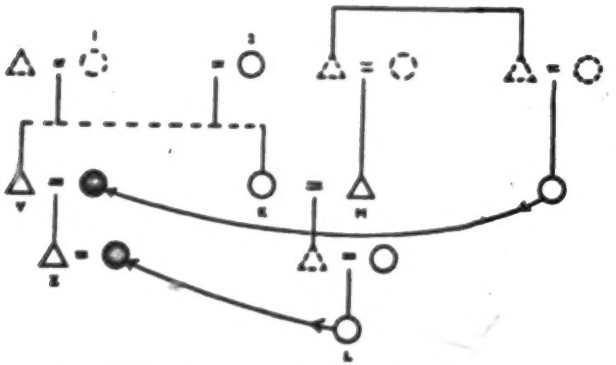

FIG. 7. An arranged marriage (Z to L) to 'knit together' the families of two affines.

growing apart (separating). Here is my son's daughter. Let us knit together the family (*ruka leloko*) else soon we shall be lost to one another'. So Z, the son of V, married L, M's granddaughter. It is interesting to note that while M had married V's half-sister, V had also married a 'sister' of M (M's father's brother's daughter), a case of 'brother-sister' exchange which is very rare among the Lobedu. Z was thus marrying his mother's 'brother's' son's daughter, who was at the same time also his father's half-sister's son's daughter.

Marriage from generation to generation with the uterine brother's daughter has important consequences for ancestor worship. It leads to a merging of ancestors on the father's and mother's sides so that they become *moloko o motse*—one lineage, as the Lobedu phrase it, with identical ancestors in at least two of the four grandparents' families. If a diviner diagnoses an illness as due to someone in a man's father's mother's lineage (which in the case of two generations of mother's brother's daughter marriages will be the same as the mother's father's lineage), then a man's mother, or even his wife, could officiate in a beer-offering in his homestead to the ancestors concerned. The Lobedu call upon and give offerings on different occasions to all four grandparents and other deceased members of their lineages. It is interesting to note that the mother's mother who never becomes by virtue of preferential marriage an ancestor common to both sides of the family and might thus be in danger of being left out, makes herself very much felt in practice. She

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is thought to be so deeply attached to her daughter's children that she is always troubling them—wanting them to be named after her, to be given her beads to wear, to have a dedicated goat or shrine set up. One therefore sometimes finds three or four shrines in a homestead.

*The Local Group*

The local group reflects the balance that is achieved among the Lobedu between agnates on the one hand, and on the other, relatives on the mother's side and affines (one and the same thing depending on the generation from which they are viewed).

A random group of thirteen homesteads forming a neighbourhood, is shown in Figure 8. They are closely linked by agnatic,

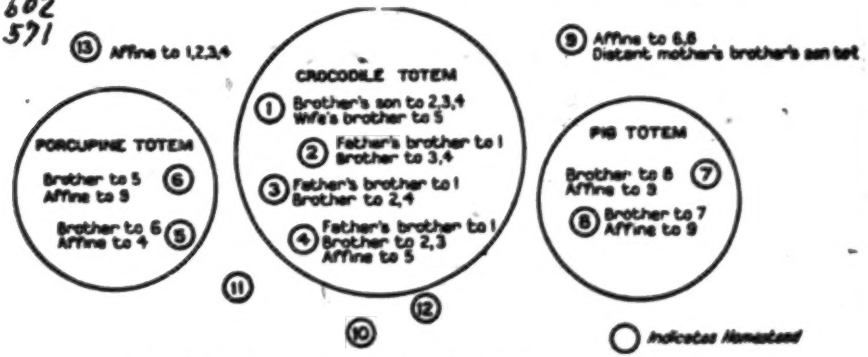


FIG. 8. Agnatic, cognatic and affinal ties in a neighbourhood.

cognatic and affinal ties and share in many economic, ritual and recreational activities.

These homesteads fall into three main clusters of agnates belonging to the Crocodile, Porcupine and Pig totems near which are two homesteads No. 9 and No. 13, which have affinal and cognatic links with these clusters, and three unrelated homesteads, Nos. 10, 11 and 12, the last-named being foreigners, Tsonga, who had little to do with the rest.

The Crocodile cluster (homesteads 1, 2, 3 and 4) had originally been a single homestead which had broken up on the death of the father, head of the district. Other close agnates lived a little further off, not shown on the diagram. This cluster

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was related to all except homesteads 10, 11 and 12: a sister of the head of homestead 1 was married in No. 13; a son in No. 4 of this cluster had married a Porcupine woman in No. 5; they had a distant mother's brother's son in No. 9 and they were related in the same way to two wives in the Pig group.

The Porcupine brothers for their part had a sister married in homestead 4 (Crocodile) and a daughter-in-law from No. 9. They therefore had affinal bonds also with two wives in the Pig group, sisters of this daughter-in-law.

The Pig group had married women from No. 9 and therefore had links also with No. 9's cross-cousins in the Crocodile cluster and with No. 9's affines, the Porcupines.

The manner in which kin of various kinds co-operate with each other and with neighbours could be seen very clearly when Enoch, head of homestead No. 9 had to meet a gift-exchange obligation involving the sending of beer to the head of a neighbouring district. The beer, made from mealies from Enoch's own fields was brewed by his mother and by his sister from homestead No. 8. When it was ready, a messenger was sent to notify (*rapa*) all their relatives (*moloko*). Calabashes for carrying the beer were borrowed from the neighbourhood and early in the afternoon a collection of women and a few men foregathered in the courtyard of Enoch's mother. There were ten calabashes and one petrol tin of beer, six baskets of Kaffir-corn and three half-filled enamel basins of grain into which the calabashes of beer were put for carrying. The grain was contributed by kin—by the cross-cousin in homestead No. 1; by the husbands (*baduhulu*) of the two sisters in homesteads Nos. 6 and 8; by two father's sister's daughters living outside the area and by a sister of the 'wife' of his mother, also outside the area, all of whom were present for the occasion. Women from the whole neighbourhood turned out to carry the beer. After the eldest sister of Enoch had poured a little beer on the ground with a prayer for luck on the journey and had drawn a magic circle round the mouth of each calabash with a charm, the party set out with ululations of joy and much talking and noise. Kin of all kinds and neighbours all contributed to the success of the enterprise and all took part in the feasting at their destination where the beer was consumed and a beast slaughtered for their entertainment.

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*Conclusion*

182 Emerging clearly from this study is the fundamental role of
421 property in maintaining the distinctive features of Lobedu
571 social structure. The scarcity of cattle among the Lobedu and the fact that they play little part in subsistence, coupled with an attitude to property which makes its accumulation of little interest and in which economic aspects of property are not always clearly distinguished from the social relationships it creates and maintains—all these factors make for a social system in which the main function of cattle is their use as bride-price and in which women can be used in quasi-economic transactions without their status being in any way depressed thereby.

595 The independence of the 'house', a basic feature of the
602 Lobedu lineage, likewise rests upon property, a husband being subject to strong sanctions to respect the economic independence of each house as against other similar units. Both husband and wife have an interest in the development of the 'house' as an entity. From the point of view of the husband each house, besides increasing his following and adding to his prestige, also adds to the number and strength of his relations with affines upon whom he can count for economic help and as friends and allies. '*Ba djealane ke ba khonane*—people who marry one another are people who agree', it is said when a man has the support of his affines. To the wife her 'house' is a means of personal fulfilment and advancement. She has considerable say over the property of her 'house'; everything she does for its advancement is for the benefit of her own sons, its heirs; the bride-price of her daughters ensures an old age free from arduous toil, while the marriage of her sons brings in addition the prestige and control that a mother has in the households of her sons and
613 their wives. The 'house' is the most important unit in the structure of the husband's lineage yet at the same time has strong economic and social links with the wife's family.

582 An important principle in the social structure is preferential
602 marriage between the son of a sister and the daughter of her uterine brother who has used her bride-price. This form of marriage and the moral right of a sister to a daughter-in-law from the 'house' established by her marriage cattle are on the

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one hand a means of binding the women of the lineage, even after their marriage, by strong links to their father's family and on the other of maintaining from generation to generation the bonds with the maternal kin created by the marriage of the parents.

A woman has a dual role in the social structure. On the one hand by establishing a 'house' in her husband's lineage, she is the means whereby his lineage is perpetuated and its numbers increased; for even after the death of her husband his brothers will raise seed to his name and in the absence of sons she can herself ensure the continuation of her husband's lineage by marrying a woman on behalf of a fictitious son. On the other hand a woman remains important to her own lineage: if she is the eldest child of her 'house' she will officiate at all important religious offerings (if her brother is older he may officiate but she will always be called to collaborate with him); when she dies her name and those of her sisters will be included among the names of ancestors called upon in prayer; she divides out the inheritance on the death of her uterine brother; she guards the interests of the children of her cattle-linked brother's 'house' whence she will obtain a daughter-in-law; upon her falls the responsibility in the absence of her parents of providing an heir in her mother's 'house' (of her father's lineage) should there be no son; and she may even act in the place of her deceased father as ruler over a district until the heir is of age or until one can be raised.

The maintenance of links with married sisters and its complement marriage with the mother's uterine brother's daughter, by means of which one's links with one's wife's (or mother's) family are perpetuated, are supreme values in Lobedu society. That is why a wife who has no son has little difficulty in persuading her husband to hand over her daughter's bride-price to her brother rather than create links with a strange family. It is possible thereby to 'build a house' (or 'make a gate') at her brother's home from which her daughter's son will obtain a wife. This may at first sight appear to be very like the transfer of rights from mother to daughter but this is not the case. It is made possible by the transfer of cattle belonging to the daughter's husband and is bound up with the great desire to maintain links between the descendants of brother and sister. The right

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of a woman to 'someone to stamp for her' from the 'house' created by her bride-price also enables the father of a woman who has no uterine brother to control to some extent, by the placement of his daughter's cattle, the marriage of her sons. Her husband 'follows the tracks of his cattle' to find a wife for his son but it is her father who determines where these 'tracks' will lead to.

There are thus to be found in Lobedu social structure a neat balance between the various kinds of kin; a combination of patrilineal principles with strong matrilineal bonds; a merging of ancestors on the father's and mother's side of the family; and an equality in the importance of paternal and maternal kin which is seen on all social and ritual occasions and is reflected also in the composition of local groups.

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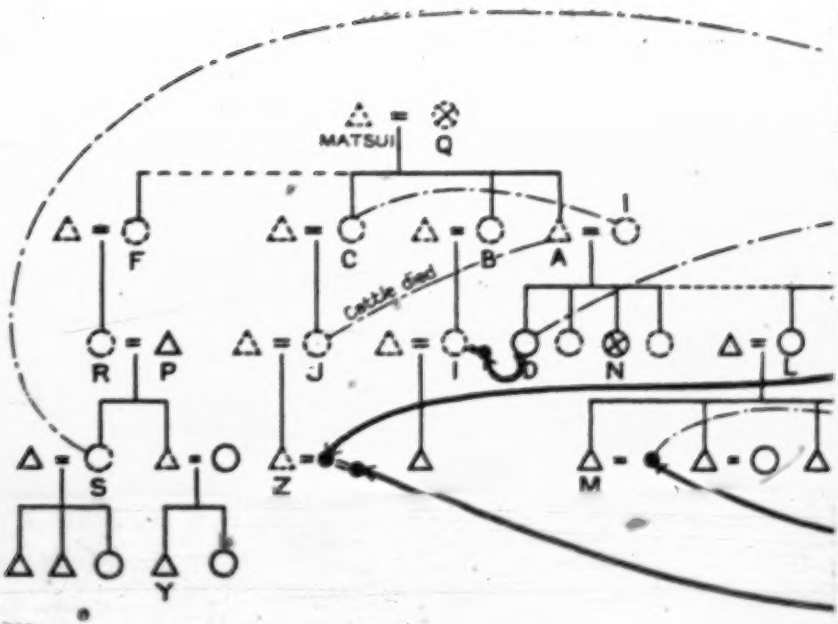


△ ○ Indicates deceased.
Indicates half-siblings.
Indicates full siblings.
● Indicates preferred wife.

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[p. 192-A]

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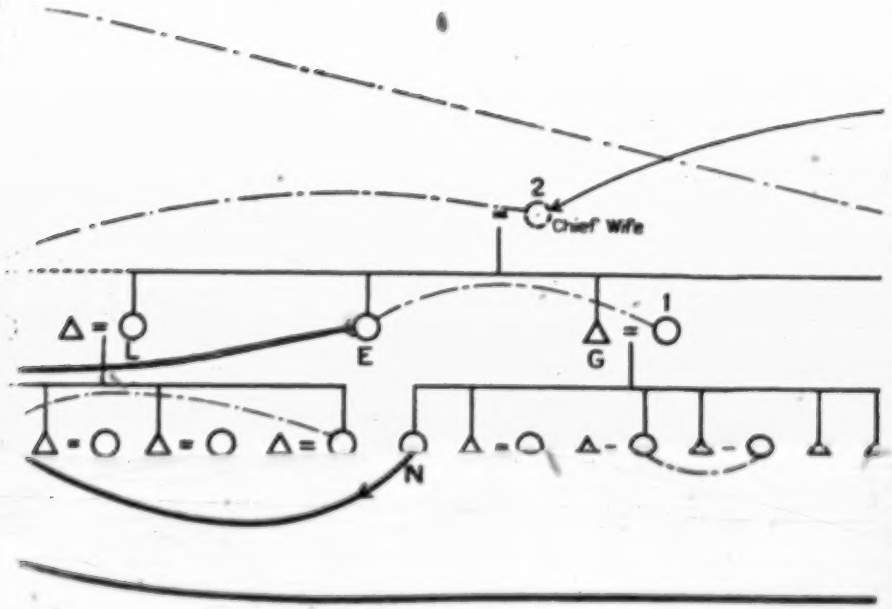


Indicates cattle-link between a wife and the husband's female relative with

Indicates passage of a women in marriage. Single lines denote incoming wives
Double lines denote outgoing females marrying a father's sister or her de

Indicates women marriage of a girl with a married female relation.

Indicates a women who is or has been a motanoni ('wife') of the queen.

[p. 192-B]

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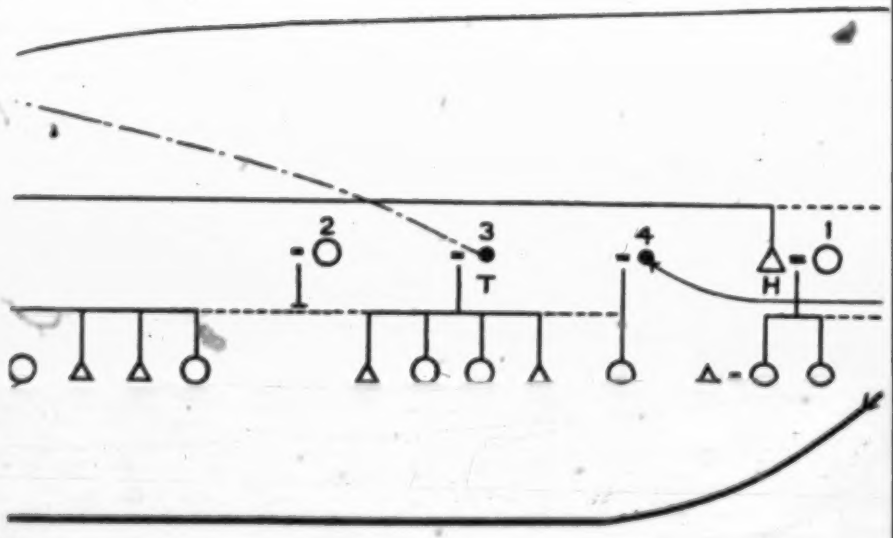


relative with whose cattle she was acquired.
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FIG. 9. Preferential marriages and cattle links in a line

[p. 192-C]

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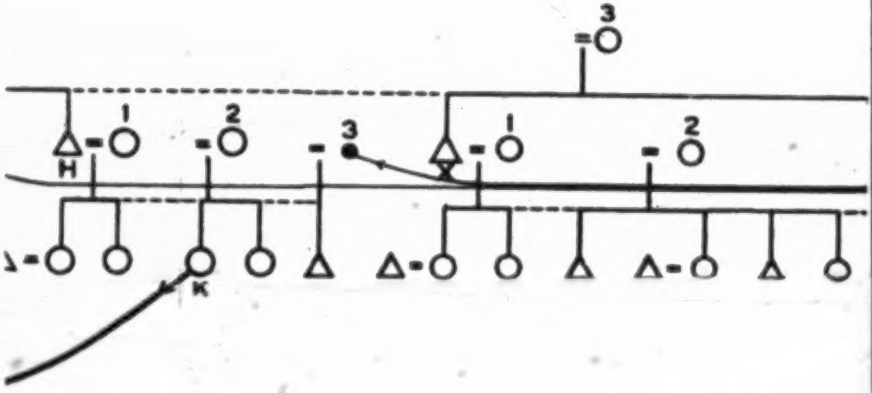


e links in a lineage-segment.

[p. 192-D]

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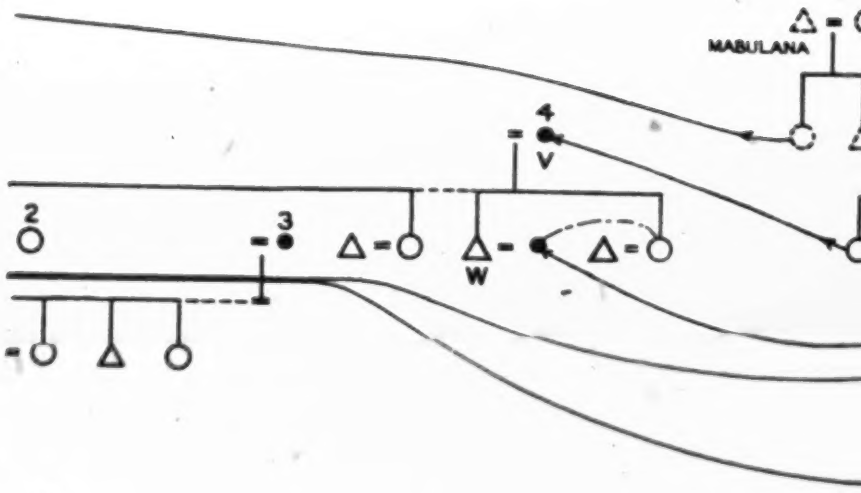


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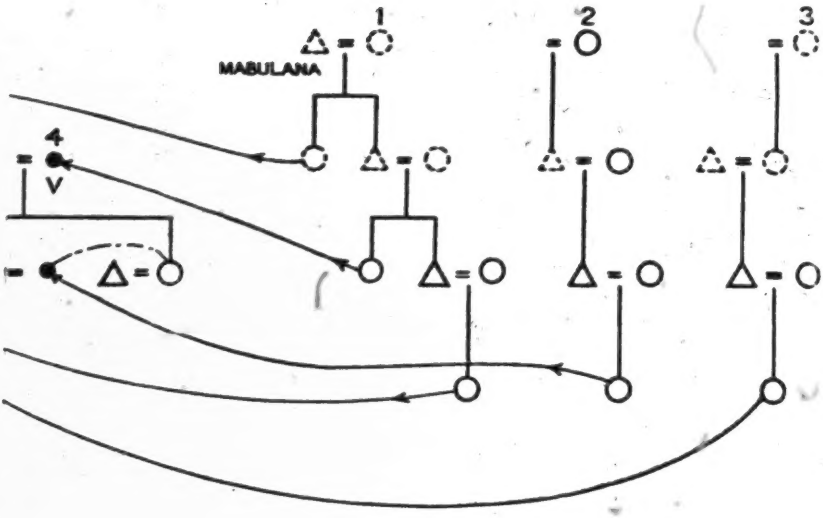


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## LOBEDU PROPERTY, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

### APPENDIX I

THE manner in which many of the characteristics of Lobedu marriage arrangements operate in practice is illustrated in the case of the lineage segment of A and his descendants set out in Figure 9. The arrows in the diagram all represent the passage of women in preferential marriage from their parental home to that of their husband: single arrows indicate women of the mother's brother's family (i.e., the Mabulanas) who have married into A's lineage (Matsui); double arrows indicate the departure of women of A's lineage to marry at their father's sister's. The following are points to be noted:

(a) The tendency for Lobedu polygynists to marry more than one wife from the same family is seen in Figure 9 in A's marriage to his fourth wife who was his second wife's brother's daughter.

(b) The manner in which cross-cousin marriage perpetuates links with the wife's kin down the generations is illustrated by the marriages of A's sons G, H, W and X. G's fourth wife, H's third wife and W's first wife all come from the same lineage, that of their mothers (A's second and fourth wives). A's son X's third wife is also his uterine cross-cousin but it was not practicable to indicate her family of origin also in the diagram.

(c) Besides reinforcing links with the maternal kin, mother's brother's daughter marriage serves also to knit together descendants of a man and his sisters. The bonds between A and his sisters B and C have been kept alive over a span of two generations of their descendants by the marriage of A's daughter D to I (daughter of his sister B) as indicated by the double arrow in Figure 9, and the marriage of A's daughter E to Z (son of J, and grandson of A's sister, C). Similarly G's daughter N by his first wife is married to the son (M) of his sister L (see double arrows), and H's daughter K is married to her father's sister E, widow of Z, a marriage which took place in 1961.

(d) The part played by cattle links in ensuring preferential marriage is also illustrated in the diagram; but it is clear too that children of brother and sister who are *not* cattle-linked often also marry one another. Z married E because of cattle-links two generations above him as is explained below. But when E grew old and needed a 'wife' G had no suitable daughter; so H's daughter K 'married' her. Cattle-links also did not account for the marriage of A's daughter, D, to his sister I, nor of G's daughter N to his sister L's son M. These indicate the tremendous value attached to maintaining links with married sisters. The reasons for the marriage of

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582 583 591 602 613 E to Z are complicated and indicate how personal and other factors may interfere with the best-laid cattle-linking arrangements. C, the cattle-linked sister of E's father, A, had no son; so C gave the bride-price of her only daughter, J, to her brother A in accordance with procedure described in the text of this essay. All but one of these cattle died shortly after and then A said he did not want the cattle. C then tried to establish a 'house' with her daughter's cattle by handing over the remaining head of cattle to a classificatory brother (her father's half-brother's son). Her husband augmented this head of cattle by others obtained with his earnings from migrant labour. Unfortunately, however, these cattle instead of being used for marriage were 'eaten' (squandered) by her 'brother' and the whole plan came to nothing. Now, because E's father A had used C's cattle to marry his first wife and then had married E's mother with the bride-price of D (a daughter of his marriage to his first wife), therefore A, repenting of his earlier treatment of C and realizing he was indirectly indebted to C (and J) also for his second wife (mother of E), sent his daughter E to 'cook for J' (C's daughter) and marry her son.

(e) An example of the judicious placement of cattle for purposes of promoting marriage alliances between one's own male descendants and the daughters of a friend or relative in a preferred family is to be found in the action of P in Figure 9, who was married to R the daughter of A's half-sister F. After his son's death he gave his daughter S's, bride-price to G (a descendant of his wife's mother's brother) who acquired his third wife T with it. P has thus 'built a house' (that of T) where his son's son Y will find a wife.

588 591 (f) Three instances of the marriage of a woman to another woman are to be found in the lineage-segment of A—that of D to I; that of K to E, widow of Z; and that of A's daughter N to the queen. [634] In the first case I wished to raise an heir to her deceased brother, in whose place she was ruling a district; in the second case E had daughters but no son and she wished to have someone to 'cook for' her; in the case of N, her father A as district headman had sent his daughter to be a *motanoni* of the queen.

613 582 588 (g) That the same lineage can be both wife-receiving and wife-giving in respect of the queen is illustrated by the fact that A's father had received in marriage from the queen a wife Q but A had also sent his daughter N to marry the queen.

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(h) The incidence of cross-cousin marriage and its variations in two generations of descendants of A (counting only the actual members of his lineage as shown in Figure 9) over a time-span of over sixty years (i.e., from about 1895 to 1962) was 31 per cent (nine out of twenty-nine marriages).

The arrangements in the above lineage segment are by no means unusual. This lineage is that of a district head, but it is representative of numbers of cases that could be chosen from among non-Christian traditionalists who still form the majority of the tribe.

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